

Lifestyles

10,000 Poohs make for world record

Guinness Book recognizes Vernon woman

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“My dad collected antiques, and my grandfather had a scrapyard. I was genetically doomed,” Deb Hoffmann joked sitting at her kitchen table in her Town of Vernon home.

Hoffmann’s home is incredibly neat, with a distinct style, but visitors may not realize until given a tour that Hoffmann is the proud owner of the Guinness Book of World Record’s Largest Winnie The Pooh and Friends collection. At 10,002, the collection takes up three rooms and a closet — floor-to-ceiling — with each Pooh in its perfect place.

The start of a collection

It was 10,001 items ago that Hoffmann fell in love with Winnie the Pooh after her father brought home a stuffed Pooh when she was in sixth grade. Hoffman loved Pooh, but even more, she loved collecting.

In college she started a stuffed owl collection, and when her first job out of college landed her across the street from a novelty phone store, her ketchup-bottle college phone found company with hamburger phones, pickle phones and the like. Hoffmann had walked past the Winnie the Pooh phone in the store several times, but it wasn’t until it was off that shelf that Hoffmann decided it had to be hers.

“I started putting ads in newspapers because this was before Internet and eBay and all of that, so I had to call up the paper and place an ad looking for a Winnie the Pooh telephone. Somebody in Orlando answered my ad,” Hoffmann said before recalling the comedic nature of the transaction. “It was the fun of the hunt of finding that phone.”

That was 25 years ago. Hoffmann said that as Disney began

competing with Ty collectibles, the amount of merchandise out there just grew, creating a never-ending challenge and life-long treasure hunt for Hoffmann and her husband of 26 years, Gary.

Becoming a record holder

“So maybe I had a couple thousand and didn’t realize it,” Hoffmann said. “Somebody said ‘Deb, I bet you have the most in the world’ and I just thought ‘No!’”

But Hoffmann, always up for a challenge, decided to look into what it takes to get in the Guinness Book of World Records for something like a Pooh collection.

“It took about a year to find everything in the house — you know, you have a pencil there and some stickers here and that sweatshirt there,” Hoffmann said. “Thank God my husband was a programmer, and he created a database to track everything.”

The criteria for the record, Hoffmann explained, is specific and requires several layers of verification, but by 2009 her paperwork had been submitted and 3,891 became the magic number that caught the attention of the record books. Guinness eventually came to the Hoffmanns’ home and took a photo of Hoffmann that later became a centerfold.

“You take pictures and send documents and letters and just hope nobody is as freaky as you, and you still have the record,” Hoffmann said with a laugh.

Hoffmann is able to update her number of items once a year to retain her record.

“The first and second time there was nothing significant about the numbers, but after that we started submitting significant numbers. The third was 5,150 which is the police code for crazy person and then 7,777 for the luck,” Gary Hoffmann explained. “Then it was going to be 10,001, but then somebody donated one more item so we had to keep that in the count.”

Item 10,000



Staff photo by Kaitlin Phillips

Deb Hoffmann of Vernon shows one of three rooms in her home dedicated to Winnie the Pooh merchandise. Her collection has more than 10,000 items.

Hoffmann’s 10,000th item wasn’t the smallest (a gold charm), or the largest (a 6-foot costume). It wasn’t the most unique (handmade stuffed Pooh characters), and didn’t come from the farthest away, but she did find it most appropriate.

Every year the Hoffmanns take a trip to White River, Canada, to the little-known birthplace of the actual bear that started the Winnie the Pooh series. Though his claim to fame was in London, where the real Christopher Robin visited him at the London Zoo, the first stuffed Pooh was actually first purchased in White River and later donated across the pond.

On the anniversary of the date he was purchased, White River throws a Winnie the Pooh festival at which Hoffmann has become master of ceremonies. A couple she met there donated item number 10,000.

“I thought it was really appropriate. It’s a passport cover. I thought it was really fun because Winnie the Pooh is from Canada, his claim to fame was in London, and then Disney bought the rights to market him,” Hoffmann said. “It’s just

fun to have gotten the 10,000th item.”

Collectibles changes

It’s also apparent when chatting with Hoffmann that how she collects and the value of the collection has been drastically altered over the past 25 years. From placing newspaper ads and exchanging letters to work out a deal with a buyer, to eBay, Craigslist and Internet forums, Hoffmann said that for some the new way to collect may be frustrating, but for her it’s a whole lot of fun.

“(The Internet) makes it easier, but it hurts values as well. Because people can get at things easier they don’t have quite as much value. People are willing to sell them for a whole lot less,” Hoffmann said. “If you’re collecting for value, it’s probably bad, but for someone like me, collecting to complete collections or for fun, it’s a good thing because I can find it easier, and I don’t have to pay as much.”

Hoffmann said she averages \$5-\$6 per collectible; some she finds at thrift stores for 10 cents, others online for \$40. She said that while the retail value of her collection might be close to \$250,000, she paid probably less

than a quarter of that.

“I think there are different types of collectors. There are some who collect and keep the box and the tag and someday plan to sell it. But when I go up to the big honey pot in the sky, my collection will be donated so it’s a good thing,” Hoffmann said.

And although things are easier to find, Hoffmann said there are still things are her list that she can’t find and money probably can’t buy.

“Deb’s bucket list: I played Winnie the Pooh for Sears in the ’80s. I would love to find that costume. That’s my holy grail. I have ads everywhere and have always looked for it,” Hoffmann said. “I’d like to go England. I’d also love to speak to the voice of Winnie the Pooh, Jim Cummings.”

And although Hoffmann is a world record holder, she doesn’t see her habit of collecting Pooh items as being much different than everyone else.

“If you compared my collecting to people who buy Starbucks coffee, cigarettes, go to ball games, maybe are in a bowling league, I’m probably not that much different,” she said.